

RENTON CITY COUNCIL
Regular Meeting

October 4, 1999
Monday, 7:30 p.m.

Council Chambers
Municipal Building

MINUTES

CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Jesse Tanner led the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag and called the meeting of the Renton City Council to order.

**ROLL CALL OF
COUNCILMEMBERS**

KING PARKER, Council President; TIMOTHY SCHLITZER; RANDY CORMAN; TONI NELSON; BOB EDWARDS; KATHY KEOLKER-WHEELER; DAN CLAWSON.

**CITY STAFF IN
ATTENDANCE**

JESSE TANNER, Mayor; JAY COVINGTON, Chief Administrative Officer; LARRY WARREN, City Attorney; MARILYN PETERSEN, City Clerk; MIKE WEBBY, Human Resources & Risk Management Administrator; ABDOUL GAFOUR, Water Utility Supervisor; DEREK TODD, Finance Analyst; CHIEF A. LEE WHEELER, Fire Department; DEPUTY CHIEF GARY GOTTI, Fire Department; COMMANDER CURTIS SMALLING, Police Department.

PRESS

Robert Teodosio, *Renton Reporter*

**APPROVAL OF
COUNCIL MINUTES**

MOVED BY PARKER, SECONDED BY CLAWSON, COUNCIL APPROVE THE MINUTES OF SEPTEMBER 27, 1999 AS PRESENTED. CARRIED.

SPECIAL PRESENTATION

Council: Initiative 695 (MVET Rollback and Voter Approval Required for Tax & Fee Increases)

Mayor Tanner explained that the City invited both a proponent and an opponent of Initiative 695 to make brief presentations of their positions before the Council this evening. The initiative, which will go before voters to be decided in November, has the following ballot wording: "Shall voter approval be required for any tax increase, license tab fees be \$30 a year for motor vehicles, and existing taxes be repealed?" Robert Burmeister presented the "pro" argument while Jay Arnold presented the "against" argument. Mr. Arnold won the coin toss and elected to go second in the presentations.

Mr. Burmeister felt that state and local jurisdictions should approach their budgets in the same manner in which he did his own personal one, and make necessary adjustments only on an as-needed basis. Saying that Washington state does not need a \$1 billion surplus, he added that Colorado voters enacted legislation similar to this in 1992 without any ill effects. He concluded that Washington taxpayers need a break, and the Motor Vehicle Excise Tax (MVET) has gotten out of control.

Jay Arnold, a volunteer for the "No on I-695" campaign, said although the initiative's simple message has broad public appeal, the underlying issues are quite complicated. Claiming that I-695 has major, serious flaws, he said it will harm roads, transportation projects and transit throughout the state. It would also cut other important state and local programs which many people support.

Mr. Arnold explained that revenue from the MVET is distributed as follows: 49% to state transportation programs, 29% to local transit, and 24% to local governments for transportation, criminal justice, and other purposes. If the initiative passes, up to \$1.1 billion would be lost in the current biennium and \$1.7 billion in the 2001-2003 biennium. This would affect local transit districts, city and county criminal justice systems, county public health departments, key state transportation programs (including the ferry system) and the state's sales tax equalization program, which gives assistance to poorer cities and counties.

Continuing, Mr. Arnold described the potential impacts to transportation projects, saying that I-695 would completely negate the benefits of Referendum 49 which are only now beginning to be realized. Specifically, \$7 billion in funding for transportation projects would be lost over the next six years. Up to 74,000 construction-related jobs would disappear, and many public employees would also lose their jobs, including police officers and firefighters. Metro alone would lose nearly 25% of its budget.

Mr. Arnold added that Washington's ten largest environmental groups oppose the initiative because it would increase traffic congestion while simultaneously cutting the state's air pollution account by \$17 million to \$23 million.

Mr. Arnold said another troubling aspect of the initiative is the fact that it would require voter approval of all tax and fee increases. This would include such things as copies at the local library, admission to public zoos, and school locker fees. Additionally, elections would have to be held every two months at a cost of up to \$800,000 per election in King County alone. Mr. Arnold noted that Washington state has over 1,000 taxing jurisdictions, all of which would have to seek voter approval for any increase in taxes or fees if I-695 is approved.

Mr. Arnold clarified that Colorado's initiative did not require voter approval of all fee increases, as I-695 would. In fact, when they had previously been asked to approve such a proposal, Colorado's voters refused to do so. He emphasized that most states which have tab fees as low as \$30 also have state income taxes.

In rebuttal, Mr. Burmeister stated that after Colorado passed its initiative, 76% of the tax increases proposed to its voters were approved. He felt this indicated that people are willing to pay for what they want, such as adequate public safety resources. He emphasized that Washington's MVET comprises only two percent of the entire state budget, and thus cannot have that great of an impact as its opponents are claiming.

In rebuttal, Mr. Arnold explained that the 2% figure cited by I-695 supporters includes such things as federal funds, bonds and matching funds, none of which is controlled or appropriated by the state legislature. He added that promoting this 2% figure ignores the fact that transit budgets will be hit hard, as will various communities which are less well-off than others across the state.

As far as Colorado, Mr. Arnold said that state's voters did not cut any of their taxes with their initiative, nor did they require voter approval for all fee increases. Colorado has a state income tax along with a MVET and sales and gas taxes. Also, Colorado residents have a higher per-household tax burden, averaging 6.8% of each household's total income, than Washington residents do at 5.7%.

Council President Parker held the state legislature partly responsible for the appeal to voters of I-695 as he felt it has not been sufficiently responsive to the state's transportation needs. Saying that the efficient movement of goods and services is a high priority issue for Washington, he was concerned that Renton be able to move forward on several key transportation projects, including the completion of Oakesdale Ave. SW, the extension of Strander Blvd. and the road improvements related to Port Quendall.

Referring to this area's ongoing concerns about family wage jobs and human services needs, Councilmember Keolker-Wheeler said it would be illogical to

charge those who can afford to buy more expensive vehicles the same license fee as those who cannot afford a nicer or newer car.

Mr. Burmeister replied that purchasers of more expensive vehicles also pay more sales tax upfront, which goes into the state's general fund. He suggested that if the MVET is lowered, more people will upgrade to a better car.

Responding to a question from Councilmember Clawson regarding the importance of the state's rainy day fund, Mr. Burmeister felt that the state should not keep more than a six-month reserve, if any. He added that residents would likely spend any money the state gave back to them, which would benefit the economy.

Replying to Councilman Edwards, City Attorney Lawrence J. Warren said it is within Council's purview to take a formal position on any ballot proposition, should it desire to do so. (See page 342 for further discussion of this subject.)

ADMINISTRATIVE REPORT

Chief Administrative Officer Jay Covington reviewed a written administrative report summarizing the City's recent progress towards goals and work programs adopted as part of its business plan for 1999 and beyond. Items noted included:

- * Transportation Operations has moved its traffic computer from the old municipal building to its temporary new location at Fire Station 11. The entire fifth floor of this building will now be leased to icopyright.
- * On October 16th, volunteer naturalists will provide information at the Renton Library and Riverview Park on spawning salmon, the Cedar River's history, and the life cycle and habitat needs of its fish.
- * The Human Services Division's Housing Repair Program had yet another successful summer, having painted 19 houses, cleaned gutters at 47 residences, trimmed shrubs and bushes at 41 homes, and hauled yard debris from 28 others.

Councilmember Keolker-Wheeler suggested that the home repairs which remain on the City's waiting list be referred to the Christmas in April program.

AUDIENCE COMMENT

Citizen Comment: Ford –
Initiative 695

Lee Ford, 372 Stevens Ave. SW, Renton, said that I-695's impacts to Renton would not be great as the City stands to lose only about \$625,000 out of its total \$130 million budget. Mayor Tanner clarified that Renton's general fund, which is the portion of the budget that would be affected by a MVET reduction, is \$54 million.

Continuing, Mr. Ford suggested that the state could license vehicles every two years rather than every year to save on administrative costs. He objected to the fact that the state's transportation division awarded a contract to Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. to study marine safety at a cost of \$750,000, when he felt it could have obtained the same information from the Washington State Coast Guard for free. He said the state's current MVET is atrocious to the average taxpayer.

Councilman Edwards invited Mr. Ford to stay engaged with the City during its upcoming budget deliberations, especially if the I-695 passes and Renton must figure out how it will accomplish various desired transportation projects.

Mayor Tanner commented that on top of losing \$625,000 in revenue if the initiative is approved, Renton would also have to pay another \$600,000 for health care costs for low-income, uninsured residents who are currently covered

through MVET revenue. Thus the total minimal impact to Renton would be more than \$1.2 million.

Councilman Corman was troubled by the proposal that voters must decide all tax and fee increases, saying this would place a huge burden on voters to educate themselves about all possible increases and the implications associated with approving or rejecting each one. He noted that a Renton resident would have to consider every tax and fee increase proposed for not only the city, but also those for the entire state and for King County as well as for their individual fire district, school district, and public hospital district. (See later this page for further discussion of this issue.)

CONSENT AGENDA

Items on the consent agenda are adopted by one motion which follows the listing.

Finance: City of Renton 1998
State of Washington Audit
Report

City Clerk submitted the 1998 Washington State Auditor's Office Audit Report for the City of Renton for the period of January 1 through December 31, 1998. Information.

Annexation: Morrison, East
Renton Plateau

Economic Development, Neighborhoods and Strategic Planning Department requested a public hearing be set on October 18, 1999 to take testimony on the 60% Petition to Annex for the Morrison Annexation, 40.56 acres adjacent to the existing City limits on the East Renton Plateau. Council concur.

**MOVED BY PARKER, SECONDED BY SCHLITZER, COUNCIL
APPROVE THE CONSENT AGENDA AS PRESENTED. CARRIED.**

OLD BUSINESS

Parks: Skateboard Park in
Renton

Councilman Schlitzer reminded Council that it adopted a Community Services Committee report on May 11, 1999 in which it stated its intent to "expedite the siting and construction of a skateboard park" in Renton. He asked the Administration for assistance in determining the estimated cost of such a park.

Mayor Tanner replied that he did not consider this to be an essential item and therefore will not include it in his proposed budget for next year; however, Council can always reappropriate the estimated \$150,000 cost if it so chooses. He suggested that Council take this matter up after the Mayor's proposed budget is presented on November 1st.

Responding to Councilman Clawson, Mayor Tanner agreed to have Community Services Administrator Jim Shepherd report to Council on the steps necessary to site and build a skateboard park, including potential issues associated with such a facility.

Finance Committee

Finance: Vouchers

Finance Committee Substitute Chair Keolker-Wheeler presented a report recommending approval of Payroll Vouchers 21842 - 22083 and 511 direct deposits in the total amount of \$939,223.09. **MOVED BY KEOLKER-WHEELER, SECONDED BY NELSON, COUNCIL CONCUR IN THE COMMITTEE REPORT. CARRIED.**

ORDINANCES AND RESOLUTIONS

Resolution #3411

Fire: Emergency Management
Plan

A resolution was read adopting the City of Renton Emergency Response Plan. **MOVED BY PARKER, SECONDED BY SCHLITZER, COUNCIL ADOPT THE RESOLUTION AS READ. CARRIED.**

Council: Initiative 695 (MVET
Rollback and Voter Approval
Required for Tax and Fee

Councilman Schlitzer said he received and has reviewed three different packets of information on Initiative 695 from the Association of Washington Cities, Renton city staff, and assorted media articles. He feared that if I-695 passes, it would

Increases)

disrupt government as it is currently known, and that it would be very difficult for the various governmental entities to administer. He opposed the initiative.

MOVED BY EDWARDS, SECONDED BY SCHLITZER, COUNCIL GO ON RECORD AS OPPOSING INITIATIVE 695.*

Councilman Edwards said this proposition has numerous problems, including the fact that voters would be required to make complex decisions affecting everyone although only one in four registered voters, on average, voted in the last primary election. He felt it would be more appropriate to have the local school board decide what it should charge students for lunches and other services than for disinterested or uninformed voters to make such decisions. He added that the last thing Washington state needs at this time is to forfeit its recent progress in the area of transportation improvements, as these are greatly needed in many areas to help relieve congestion.

Councilman Clawson said because of the way the initiative is worded, it is not completely clear what effects it would have if it was approved. Adding that the initiative was conceived in anger and is probably meant to punish legislators for playing games with taxpayer funds, he said the problem is that it punishes all jurisdictions, including cities and school districts. Emphasizing that the way to properly run a city is to hire the best people possible and pay them well to do their jobs, since this saves money, he said an initiative that is passed out of anger will not have a good result. He concluded by sympathizing with the frustrations voiced by many voters, and pledged to work to cut out waste and ensure that constituents receive good value for their money.

Councilmember Keolker-Wheeler said most of the general public is less than enamored of the legislature, in part because the state plays games with taxpayer funds and programs which people take seriously. The public has also grown exasperated with how partisan politics have overtaken real issues in terms of importance. She agreed with Mr. Clawson that rather than pass this initiative out of frustration, voters should instead find a solution that does not punish everyone right down to the human services level which serves those who can least afford to pay for health care and other necessities of life.

Council President Parker added that someone has to pay for the things which government provides, including street signs, roads, sidewalks and water. He emphasized that it is properly the role of public officials in a representative democracy to make decisions regarding appropriate fees for programs and services. He wondered if the electorate should--or wants to--determine appropriate landing fees for aircraft, or whether school locker fees should be raised by five cents. Saying such a scenario would not be effective or productive, he predicted that if the initiative passes, it will advance to the courts where it would be ruled unconstitutional. He concluded that while he understood why this initiative was written, he fully believed that it would erode the most basic principles of representative government.

*MOTION CARRIED TO GO ON RECORD AS OPPOSING INITIATIVE 695.

Resolution #3412

Council: Initiative 695 (MVET
Rollback and Voter Approval
Required for Tax and Fee

A resolution was read stating the Renton City Council's opposition to Initiative 695. MOVED BY SCHLITZER, SECONDED BY EDWARDS, COUNCIL ADOPT THE RESOLUTION AS READ. CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

Increases)

The following ordinance was presented for second and final reading:

Ordinance #4795

Vacation: Maplewood Pl SE,
VAC-95-004 (Correction of
Legal Description)

An ordinance was read amending Ordinance No. 4611 to correct a scrivener's error in the legal description for the Maplewood Pl. SE street vacation (VAC-95-004). MOVED BY EDWARDS, SECONDED BY KEOLKER-WHEELER, COUNCIL ADOPT THE ORDINANCE AS READ. ROLL CALL: ALL AYES. CARRIED.

NEW BUSINESS

Planning: Request for Reduced
Driveway & Side Setback Stds
in the R-8 Zone

MOVED BY KEOLKER-WHEELER, SECONDED BY CORMAN, COUNCIL REFER A REQUEST FOR REDUCED DRIVEWAY AND SIDE SETBACK STANDARDS IN THE R-8 ZONE TO THE PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE. CARRIED.

Solid Waste: "Rehab the Lab"
Program

Councilmember Keolker-Wheeler reported on the Local Hazardous Waste Management Programs' new school program called "Rehab the Lab," which inspects school science laboratories for highly-combustible chemicals and other hazardous materials.

ADJOURNMENT

MOVED BY PARKER, SECONDED BY SCHLITZER, COUNCIL ADJOURN. CARRIED. Time: 8:45 p.m.

MARILYN J. PETERSEN, CMC, City Clerk

Recorder: Brenda Fritsvold
October 4, 1999